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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT INCREASING ACCESS TO SCREENING FOR COLORECTAL CANCER

$11-Million Colonoscopy Investment Will Save Lives Of Ontarians

TORONTO – As a result of an $11 million investment by the McGuinty government, 34,421 more Ontarians will have access to colonoscopies this year, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"We're delivering on our commitment to increase access to colonoscopies to help save the lives of Ontarians who may be at risk," Smitherman said. "Colonoscopies can lead to early detection of this deadly form of cancer, offering a significantly greater chance that it can be treated and cured."

This investment will cover the cost of these additional colonoscopies in hospitals across the province. Cancer Care Ontario is distributing funds to the hospitals, monitoring the contracts and reporting on access to colonoscopies.

Increasing access to colonoscopies is part of the government's five-year, $193.5-million colorectal cancer screening program – the first of its kind in Canada – that was announced in January.

"Ontario's colorectal cancer screening program will save lives and spare many from suffering advanced colorectal cancer." said Terry Sullivan, President and CEO, Cancer Care Ontario. "The expansion of high quality colonoscopy services is an important milestone in the implementation of the colorectal cancer screening program that will improve cancer detection across Ontario."

A colonoscopy is a procedure that examines the lining of the rectum and colon for abnormalities that might be cancerous. People who are at an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer because they have a family history of this disease as well as those who have a positive fecal occult blood test are referred for a colonoscopy.

"A person with colorectal cancer has no symptoms at first, so screening is the best way to detect cancer early," said Dr. Linda Rabeneck, Vice President, Regional Cancer Services, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, and Medical Director, Colorectal Cancer Screening Program. "If detected in its early stages, there is a 90 per cent chance colorectal cancer can be cured."

This year, in addition to creating expanded capacity for screening colonoscopies, the program is developing educational initiatives about colorectal cancer screening to assist primary care physicians and other health care professionals.

"A province-wide colorectal cancer screening program is a major step forward in cancer prevention and care. This program will give surgeons and other health professionals additional tools and resources to detect and treat cancer early," said Dr. Robin McLeod, Professor of Surgery and Health Policy Management, University of Toronto, and Head of Division of General Surgery, Mount Sinai Hospital.

This is just the latest example of the McGuinty government's commitment to fighting cancer. Other initiatives include:

- Investing $152.1 million to fund 19 cancer fighting drugs, including Velcade and Herceptin;
- Investing $44.5 million in new or expanded programs at six regional cancer centres (Mississauga, Oshawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton, Sudbury and Thunder Bay);
- Reducing radiation wait times by 33 per cent over the last three years;
- Investing in nine new or expanded regional cancer centres over the last three years.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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